

GambleAware

**Media guidelines for
reporting on gambling and
gambling harms**

Gambling is a major public health concern and is therefore a subject that is very much in the public interest

Gambling harms can affect anyone- not just those who gamble, but also their families and communities- with people from ethnic minority backgrounds or more deprived areas being more likely to experience gambling harms.

Unfortunately, the stigma surrounding harmful gambling acts as a barrier to people realising they have a problem and seeking the necessary help. Too often people say that shame, embarrassment, and guilt prevent them from reaching out for support.

Media coverage can influence public opinion, how people behave in a crisis and their beliefs about the options open to them. In some cases media coverage of gambling can sometimes contribute to misconceptions and stigma, particularly when it comes to its harmful effects. For those experiencing gambling harms, reporting on gambling using stigmatised language can serve to exacerbate harm- fuelling a sense of exclusion or culpability for their gambling, which prevents individuals from seeking help. Given the influential role the media plays, these guidelines have been developed in order to promote and support responsible media reporting on gambling harms. They are based on the latest research, insights from gambling harms experts and feedback from affected communities.

These guidelines represent an ongoing endeavour to encourage media professionals to report on this issue in a sensitive and accurate manner, whilst effectively raising awareness of the risks associated with gambling and the solutions and support that are available. Language constantly evolves, and this guide will be updated in line with findings from our stigma research programme and wider feedback. It is important to note that this guide does not intend to change the language of those who have lived experience of gambling harms. Feedback from members of our Lived Experience Council noted that individuals experiencing harm can find it useful to describe themselves however they see fit, as it is a personal decision, which can be used to self-identify as part of their recovery journey. A companion guide for those working in the gambling harms sector has also been produced and can be found on our website.

These guidelines are designed to be supportive, advisory and are in no way intended to limit press freedom. Their objective is to reinforce industry code of practice and editorial policies, to support journalists and programme makers in producing the highest standards of coverage around gambling and gambling harms.

Responsible reporting can highlight the ways in which people can access support and, ultimately, help save lives.

"Having experienced problems with my gambling in the past, I know just how damaging stigmatising language can be. Seeing phrases in the media like 'problem gambler' can be so demoralising as it reduces you to only your behaviour. It made me feel isolated, ashamed, and like a burden to my family and friends. These feelings made that first step of seeking help so much harder. I hope these reporting guidelines will change the narrative around gambling harms, opening up the conversation and empowering those facing harm from their gambling to seek support."

David Quinti,
in recovery from gambling harms

Eight considerations and resources for journalists to support the highest standard of reporting on gambling harms

1 Report on gambling stories in a person-first manner

Use language in headlines and articles that doesn't reduce individuals experiencing gambling harms to 'problem gamblers' or 'gambling addicts'. Using **'person-first'** language, rather than reductive language, shows that an individual is more than just someone experiencing problems with their gambling. Terms such as someone who: **is experiencing gambling harms, or has problems with their gambling**, help reassure those experiencing harms that they are not to blame, and are not defined by their gambling behaviours.

2 Avoid sensationalising or glorifying stories related to gambling

Stories that centre around huge wins or celebrity endorsements of gambling can serve to exacerbate the situation of those experiencing gambling harms. Spotlighting information about the total amount lost or focusing exclusively on financial consequences fails to reflect the way that gambling harms can impact a range of other areas, including relationships, work, and mental and physical health. Where possible, **highlight that gambling harms can be more than financial** and include the other impacted areas in your reporting, to provide a more accurate picture of gambling harms.

3 Avoid using triggering imagery or imagery that associates people who gamble with other stigmatised behaviours

Imagery involving gambling paraphernalia, or images explicitly portraying casinos or online gambling activity, can be highly triggering for people who are experiencing gambling harms. Where possible, it is best to avoid including such imagery and instead focus on **people-first imagery that help humanise the issue**. Imagery that draws links between people who gamble and other stigmatised or illegal behaviours such as drug use can equally be damaging to individuals, as conveying gambling as taking place in illicit areas or dark 'back rooms' perpetuates the stigma around the issue.

4 Approach gambling harms as a public health concern

When reporting on gambling, it is important to acknowledge that gambling harms can affect anyone. Historically, those experiencing problems with their gambling have been depicted as reckless or irresponsible, and it is important to employ language that avoids placing the blame upon individuals affected by gambling harms.

5 Avoid using language that blames the person experiencing gambling harms

Using language such as “sick”, “diseased”, or “addict” can mark those experiencing harm as inherently abnormal and/or unhealthy. This wrongly implies that it is a chronic, potentially incurable condition that defines who they are. It is important to normalise recovery and show that people can overcome gambling harms.

6 Give a voice to those who have been directly impacted by gambling harms

Elevating these voices can bring to life the experience of gambling harms and help to break down stigma associated with it. These can be voices of individuals directly impacted, as well as families and community leaders who can help normalise seeking support. Hearing their stories can highlight the complexities and layers involved in gambling harms and challenge the stereotypical public perception of someone who is experiencing them.

7 Raise awareness of the risks associated with gambling and early warning signs

Reporting on early warning signs of gambling harms normalising help seeking can clarify what affected individuals should look out for, potentially encouraging them to get the help and support they need at an early stage. These include: **losing track of time, spending more than you can afford, and keeping your gambling secret from those around you.**

8 Highlight the importance of seeking help and support, alongside raising awareness of what is available

Suggested text to include at the bottom of articles: If you're worried about how gambling makes you feel, you can find free, confidential advice, tools and support, by searching **GambleAware** or contacting the National Gambling Helpline, available 24/7, on 0808 8020 133.

A language guide to tackle stigma

In order to build empathy and responsibly portray the stories of people experiencing gambling harms and those affected, it is critical the language and terminology used reflects what we know about stigmatising and (dis)empowering language from adjacent sectors, alongside the latest feedback from the lived experience community. The below language guide was produced in a semiotics project in July 2022, which was subsequently peer-reviewed and reviewed by individuals with lived experience of gambling.

Use...

Avoid...

General guidance

Descriptive and person-centred language that shows an individual is more than just someone experiencing challenges with their gambling

Reductive terms that reduce someone's identity to their behaviour, labelling the individual as the problem/person to blame

Specific examples

Person who:

- experiences gambling harms
- experiences harms from their gambling
- experiences problems with their gambling
- experiences challenges with their gambling
- has a gambling disorder (or gambling addiction)
- is gambling problematically

Describing someone as a:

- gambling addict
- problem gambler
- disorder gambler
- compulsive gambler
- pathological gambler

Experiences problems with their gambling (or scores 8+ on the PGSI)

Problem gambler

Person who gambles

Gambler

Abstinent

Clean

No longer abstinent

Relapsed

Person in recovery

Former addict

Person in long term recovery

Reformed addict

On a new path, taking the next step, overcoming obstacles

Addiction battle, kick the habit, beat your demons

Lower-risk gambling, safer gambling environment

Responsible gambling

For any questions, advice or requests for commentary and spokespeople around breaking news, journalists can get in touch directly with GambleAware's press office: **pressoffice@gambleaware.org**.

For the support available for people experiencing harms from gambling:

If you're worried about how gambling makes you feel, you can find free, confidential advice, tools and support, by searching **GambleAware** or contacting the **National Gambling Helpline**, available 24/7, on **0808 8020 133**.